

16 April 1987

ON MY MIND

A. M. Rosenthal

Their Spies, Our Spies

LOS ANGELES

The Russians spy on us and we spy on the Russians. Win some, lose some and why all the fuss when they win one, as in the American Embassy in Moscow? Actually, except for the marines, it is rather funny and just goes to show that the two superpowers are a lot alike when you get down to it.

You hear and read that in New York and on the West Coast too. Perhaps it is also being said and written in the "great overfly," as the rest of the country is sometimes called around here.

Of course, both countries do spy on each other and lose some, although few are lost as badly as at the infiltrated embassy in Moscow — captured might be a better word.

But there are differences in the way the United States and the Soviet Union spy on each other, who is in charge and who does the spying. They tell something about the nature of Soviet and American espionage that the spy novels usually do not touch upon. And they tell something about the real worlds that are the setting for the espionage.

Who is in charge:

For the United States, generally the C.I.A. This is an agency that by law

On the differences and why they matter.

can operate only outside the United States. It has no power of arrest and is not supposed even to investigate the actions of Americans.

Theoretically, all of its work is secret, including information gained from known methods of espionage — satellites, electronic interception. Some of its work is clandestine, which means undercover or disguised, or dirty tricks.

But although it is part of the executive branch of government, it has to report to legislative committees and when they find out that the agency has been carrying on important activities without informing them, all hell breaks out, usually in public.

It is the intelligence branch of a democratic society. This means that the American public is ultimately responsible for the C.I.A. and its transgressions. It elects the President to whom the C.I.A. reports and the Congressional representatives who appropriate the budget and have the official oversight.

The public can express its displeasure and influence the C.I.A. by the vote, press investigations, political action and by demonstrations, as Amy Carter did at a university. Perhaps she will also consider demonstrating at other sites — the homes of those who have been responsible for the C.I.A., including one in Plains, Ga.

In the Soviet Union, the K.G.B. is in charge. The K.G.B. is not an intelligence agency, although espionage and counterespionage are part of its responsibility.

The K.G.B. is a police and political army through which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union exercises its control of the state, including the bureaucracy and the armed forces, and of the entire Soviet population.

It has its officials in every branch of government and often it is in clear command. It arrests, detains, tries Soviet citizens and non-citizens and it has its own nationwide prison network.

Control of the Soviet system is the most important duty of the K.G.B. so it has its agents abroad to supervise Soviet citizens and activities in foreign lands. In most embassies, the ambassador and his staff report to them. As for its espionage task, the K.G.B.'s great strength does not rest in its official agents but the fact that it can command the services of all Soviet citizens.

At home, the K.G.B. can order all Soviet citizens to report on everything they know about all foreigners. It can order Soviet citizens to carry out specific intelligence-gathering missions about foreigners in the Soviet Union and to take positions in foreign embassies, and offices. It does not rely simply on K.G.B. payroll agents for information on foreigners in the Soviet Union but on the totality of the Soviet society it polices.

Abroad, the K.G.B. depends not only on information from its agents or the Soviet diplomatic staffs it supervises, but again, on the nature of the Soviet system that puts every individual at the service of the state. Foreigners forget this, Soviet citizens do not.

The K.G.B. can order every Soviet artist, journalist, scientist or technician allowed to travel abroad to report fully and even to gather specific information. Refusal means withdrawal of travel privileges and often loss of position at home and lifelong official harassment for refusal to carry out lawful instructions of the State.

The victims of the Soviet espionage system are not only the foreigners who are its targets but the Soviet citizens who are ordered into service.

All this is simply to call to mind a little point overlooked in the amused spy talk these days. Espionage is carried out by a system of government and for a system of government. The superpowers are not alike and if that matters so does who wins and who loses the big ones. □